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The Grammar of the Puinave Language

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Summary

This *Wánsöhöt* grammar begins with a brief description of the ethnohistory and ethnography of the *Wánsöhöt* people, who inhabit the Colombian-Venezuelan border area (Inírida River) in north-western Amazonia. It also deals with the genetic classification of the language.

Following this is Part II, a phonological description of the language, which starts by studying the phonetic inventory and sound distribution in different syllabic positions. Afterwards, the phonological oppositions are defined, with special attention given to the underlying representations of glides [w, j] which are derived from the corresponding underlying vowels /u, i/ at syllable margins. The hypothesis that the contrast which exists in the class of non-continuous obstruents is one between voiceless plosives and nasals is proposed. The next section sheds light on morphologically conditioned phonological alternations as well as alternations characteristic of arbitrary sets of lexical items (§5). The following chapter describes the tonal system of the language. It deals with the contrastive function of tone in the lexicon and the way in which it determines the prosody of the word. This chapter ends with a brief description of the tonal variation of the agentive verbal derivation.

Part III deals with *Wánsöhöt* morphology beginning with a short summary of the clause frame and predicate types (§7). Next, lexical classes are considered and the very large set of grammatical morphemes is analyzed; phonological, distributional and semantic properties are described (§8). A proposal for word categorization is made on the basis of prosodic and morphological criteria. The system of free pronouns is described in this section as well. Subsequently the nominal morphology is described (§9), with focus on the complex noun phrase structure (composition), nominal derivation (case marking), and nominal inflexion (pluralisation). The system of derived pronouns and connectives is described in §10. In §11 one finds a description of the structure of the verb phrase, starting with the verbal base. Verbal bases are categorized as mono-morphemic or poly-morphemic, and as either separable or non-separable. Then the set of bounded pre-verbal morphemes which convey argument information is analyzed and the derivational and inflexional verb morphology is presented: verb negation, verb nominalisation, and aspect and modality markers. The next chapter (§12) presents the clause level morphology, including tense and some modality types. The morphology of negation is summarized in §13 followed by adjectival morphology (§14), and a description of the categories labelled ‘particles’ (§15) and ‘conjunctions’ (§16).

In Part IV the structure of the simple clause structure is presented (§17). Four predicate types are described corresponding with a finite type and three nominalized predication perspectives, the non-finite predicate and two nominalized predicates, the object predicate construction and the agent predicate construction. §18 treats word-order, which is nearly free - although in transitive clauses with agent and object nominalized predicates there are constraints which affect the verb’s occupation of the initial position. Another constraint controls the final position of the verb in finite predicates with an OSV order. Then, in §19, the argument-marking devices and their functions are described, in both the verb phrase and noun phrase. A mixed system of grammatical relation is defined (ergative/absolutive alignment for finite predicates, and split ergativity for intransitives), based on the distribution of the *-at* mark, noun phrase distribution and other morphosyntactic properties. The

next topic under examination is an analysis of the valence changes (§20). In §21 complex predicates, auxiliary, and serial constructions are described. In §22 intransitive/non verbal predications are characterized and localization, existential, and possession predicates are discussed. Interrogative and imperative sentence types are outlined in §23. A short comment on focus and topicality is made in §24, which was also mentioned in the study of the morphosyntax, where the fact that the position of the modal markers functions as a focusing device was demonstrated. Finally, complex sentence structures are outlined, such as the ones used to encode coordinate or implicational relations between clauses. Also conditional and causation types are briefly discussed.

The final chapter addresses the genetic classification of *Wánsöhöt* and its relation to neighbouring languages. *Wánsöhöt* loans from Arawakan and Maku languages are analyzed and some *Wánsöhöt* lexical structures are compared to corresponding ones in the Maku languages. The conclusion suggests that this relation, despite being distant, is the only evidence for a connection between *Wánsöhöt* and any other language group.